

# Multi-layered Identities by Social Media and Prosumption Practices in Digital and Participatory Communication

Sunny Sui-kwong Lam  
The Open University of Hong Kong  
sunny.sk.lam@gmail.com

## Abstract

Digital and social media systems/environments are a result of collective knowledge by the wisdom of crowds and Web 2.0 participatory cultures. They reveal the digital convergence of media, communication and content production/consumption (prosumption) by mediation, remediation and mediatization. Especially, prosumption activities by the complexity of user agency in social media create user-generated content and context as new sources of information flow among online and offline communities. Prosumers' social media practices not only show their creativity and identity dynamics but also educate about brands, products and services, lifestyles and personalities, as well as social and political issues among online communities by interactive conversations and transmedia storytelling. Their active and critical participations facilitate a restructuring of the power/knowledge relationship between production and consumption, and advocate a new global economic form of prosumer capitalism within social media ecosystems. This article explores a study of prosumption dynamics via users-as-prosumers' practices and perceptions and reactions toward digital advertising and marketing in social media and digital communication. Besides, it exemplifies the use of business and video ethnography to empirically investigate prosumers' behaviors and multi-layered identities via everyday social media practices.

**Keywords:** *Digital communication, prosumption, multi-layered identities, video ethnography, transmedia*

## 1. Introduction

This article was embarked upon a marketing research concerning the users' perceptions of social media content, participation, advertising, marketing, and user-interface by means of business and video ethnography. Especially, videography was used to record informants' everyday lives to depict their lived experience of digital communication and social media practices. The intensive, non-stop audio-visual ethnographic observation is a kind of thick description of contextual knowledge. Video ethnography helps to catch up user behaviors under the rapidly changing technological and media environments. Such new and social media systems/environments are a result of collective knowledge by the wisdom of crowds and Web 2.0 participatory cultures. They reveal the convergence of media, communication and content production/consumption via mediation, remediation and mediatization in the digital age (Jenkins, 2006; Meikle & Young, 2012; Press & Williams, 2010; Surowiecki, 2004). Both traditional and new media are "central to the making of culture" (Press & Williams, 2010, p. 10) by means of transmediatization. User-generated content (UGC) as media representation for digital communication validates the applicability of video ethnography to study user behaviors on social media platforms (Jansson, 2013) from "the lived experience and materiality" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 8), as well as immateriality, of everyday social and cultural practices. This demonstrates the analytical utility of video ethnography for behavior research that is more attuned to the lived realities of everyday production/consumption (Belk & Kozinets, 2005). Certainly, business and video ethnography for market

research within a short period of time is a departure from the academic tradition of extensive fieldwork. This paper calls for a compromising model between academic and market research traditions.

UGC by prosumption provides “new sources of online information that is created, initiated, circulated and used” by prosumers who are actively “educating each other about” branding and imaging, products and services, lifestyles and personalities, and social and political issues via interactive conversations (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012, p. 127). Social media platforms such as YouTube, Google+, Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Weibo and WeChat are highly reliant on UGC by prosumers’ activities. These social media and prosumption activities transcend “the lines between one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communication” by a blending of mediated personal and mass communications (Meikle & Young, 2012, p. 10). This study focuses on the spectrum of prosumption activities by “the complexity of user agency” in social media and digital communication (van Dijck, 2009, p. 42). Video ethnography “as on-site, naturalistic, observational, or contextual research” (Mariampolski, 2006, p. ix) is deployed to explore the “new literacies and strategies” of prosumers and their attitudinal effect of social media practices on digital communication (Baym & boyd, 2012, p. 322), away from the skewed marketing research questions of who, what, and why of viral propagation of social media that can neither be predicted nor be controlled (Yeo, 2013). For getting “imaginative leaps” to prepare for the future market of digital communication and prosumer capitalism, it is important to understand their intention and nature of participation, to engage them with digital and transmedia consumption and production, and to give them reasons and motivations “to interact with marketing message” and digital advertising (Yeo, 2012, p. 297).

The objective of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it explores a new theoretical framework to study prosumption dynamics in social media and digital communication. Prosumer practices create not only UGC but also multi-layered identities to facilitate the participatory cultures among online communities. Secondly, it exemplifies video ethnography as an innovative and analytical toolkit for academic and market research by the qualitative investigation of prosumer behaviors in social media. The academic wisdom builds theory by questioning and exploring new knowledge and concept by problem-finding/problem-defining while the market research agency unveils the capability and efficiency to acquire empirical evidence. Their conjuncture sheds light on a holistic knowledge building and problem-solving tactic and strategy for investigating the new dynamics of prosumption practices within the complex social media systems/environments. This, also, gives hunches and hints to marketers and agencies for decision-making when strategically planning social media advertising and digital marketing campaigns. This research starts from questioning user behaviors on creating and viewing contents through social media. By identity mapping of different types of users who are typically regarded as the target consumers or facilitators for digital marketing and advertising, this paper discerns users-as-prosumers’ interactive and interdependent relationships, and their perceptions and reactions toward social media and digital communication in everyday lives of prosumption practices.

## 2. Social media as autopoietic systems/environments

Social media are defined as the means of interactions among online communities who create, share and exchange ideas and information via global digital networks, thus “reshaping the manner in which individuals relate to each other” by user-generated content, as well as context (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Muller, 2012, p. 269). Contemporary communication systems/environments are changing by the uprising of UGC and prosumption activities. This market research originally aimed to collect data of users of various levels of participation in social media and their perceptions of digital advertising and marketing. A bipolar categorization model that divides users into passive viewers and active creators was employed. Nevertheless, a multifarious conception of user agency to understand different levels of participation is adapted when developing this paper of academic and market research collaboration. With regard to Li and Bernoff’s (2008) segmentation of digital consumers and van Dijck’s (2009) critical analysis of social media users, the users can be categorized into five types based upon their different levels of participation in prosumption activities that contribute to UGC. “Creators” publish and upload videos, photos and other texts as active prosumption of UGC; “critics” give comments and ratings to the content; “collectors” save and share the content with other users; “joiners” connect and unite people of similar tastes and lifestyles by means of shared social mediated experiences; “spectators” read UGC without much contribution. Although it is argued that over 80% users are “passive spectators’ (33%) and ‘inactives’ (52%)” (van Dijck, 2009, p. 44), this world-wide statistics bearing in mind the problematic of digital divide (OECD, 2007) cannot reveal the real situation in well-developed metropolises like Hong Kong. On the one hand, the active users’ participatory involvement and community engagement in prosumption activities is much more attractive to marketers and advertisers. Especially the research subjects as younger digital generations who comprise higher levels of participation in social media activities are “highly engaged in electronic word-of-mouth via content creation and sharing” (Williams et al., 2012, p. 129). On the other hand, “spectators” or more accurately “lurkers” who “make up over” 40% to “90% of online groups” also contribute to an important component of online commerce and business by their lurking activities (Goriunova, 2017; Nonnecke & Preece, 2000, p. 73).

UGC that is fundamentally social defines social media and participatory culture via which creativity, information sharing, coordination and collaboration among prosumers happen (Meikle & Young, 2012). Social media platforms cannot function “without prosumers” (Ritzer, Dean, & Jurgenson, 2012, p. 386). The rapid changes in social media communication also alter the very structure of feeling or human consciousness leading to the evolutionary change of prosumers’ “bodily practices” (Woermann, 2012, p. 618). Their consciousness and meaning-construction practices form the psychic systems while social media architecture and organization for communication define the social systems. Social media platforms and prosumption activities explain social and cultural changes for their self-reproduction and self-organization in accord with Luhmann’s (1995) systems theory. The resulting autopoietic (self-reproductive)

systems/environments constitute the social media ecosystems maintained and strengthened by the complex global microstructures that facilitate decentralized, non-hierarchical working mechanisms (Cetina, 2005). Such autopoietic systems/environments require new thoughts and means of control and sharing as well as new global forms of connectivity and coordination by the self-organizing principles and patterns with the engagement of fragmented users (Baym & boyd, 2008; Cetina, 2005; Woermann, 2012). The new dynamic of prosumer capitalism reveals how the prosumption practices among online communities including creators and lurkers are co-creating and socializing their social and public lives with peers and/or “unknown friends”.

### **3. Transmediatization and prosumer capitalism**

Social media and digital communication embarks a rethinking of the concept of mediatization to understand the new waves of social, cultural and economic transformations by the autonomy of prosumption practices (Hjarvard, 2008). It is necessary to explore the complexity of prosumption practices from “a holistic, nonmedia-centric view of mediatization” (Jansson, 2013, p. 279) and transmediatization with a special attention to the interconnectivity and interdependence of public and private lives, virtual and physical realities, primary and mediated experiences (Baym & boyd, 2008). Prosumers co-create their online and offline experiences by transmedia storytelling within social media ecosystems. Social brands and marketers need to act like trusted friends with prosumers and consumers to discover the new challenges and opportunities of social media and digital communication (Briggs, 2010; Plangger, 2012).

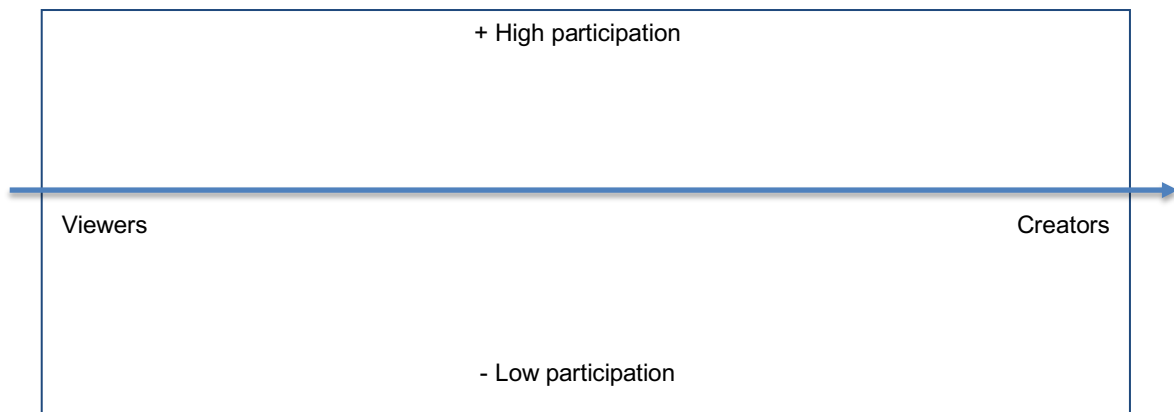
Social media practices of transmedia textures and flexibility create/co-create a sense of continuity and belonging among online and offline communities, and provide the groundwork for normalizing online/offline prosumption behaviors (Burgess & Green, 2009; Jansson, 2013). The blossoming of UGC includes prosumers of different levels of participation. The enhanced involvement of recipients and active cultural citizenship leads to the formation of communities (e.g. taste and brand communities) as groups of communal preferences in social media. They have stronger preferences to share knowledge and culture by digital communication (van Dijck, 2009; Williams et al., 2012). They employ different media and tools like cameras, screens and apps “to mediate and alter the aesthetic experience of taking part in lifestyle” across different media platforms (Woermann, 2012, p. 625). Their prosumption activities illuminate creative ideas of consumption and interaction as well as user experience and content generation by mediatization and transmediatization.

Prosumers of imagination and creativity play “new cultural roles” in social media ecosystems that request “a rethinking of both aesthetics and cultural representation” (Russell, 1999, p. xi). They are individuals of a strong “desire to engage in creative acts of self-expression” and they consume by “creating their own aesthetically significant end products” (Campbell, 2005, pp. 24, 33) to describe “their tastes, their interests and their everyday lives” (Beer & Burrows, 2010, p. 5) in social media. This new global economic form of prosumer capitalism is strengthened by social media platforms where digital content and context is abundant and created by globally networked prosumers. They are free and flexible labors working outside of professional routines and practices (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Such

prosumers possess better access to social media platforms, thus enabling them to bargain with media platform owners in cultural production formerly controlled exclusively by corporates and studios. Some may split the revenues by UGC between the owners and themselves (Burgess & Green, 2009; van Dijck, 2009). These prosumers are neither exclusively amateurs nor professionals. They are a mix of users with a strong “anti-corporate culture” and tend to blend the concepts of work and play into their user-generated content and context (van Dijck, 2009).

#### 4. Models of prosumption practices

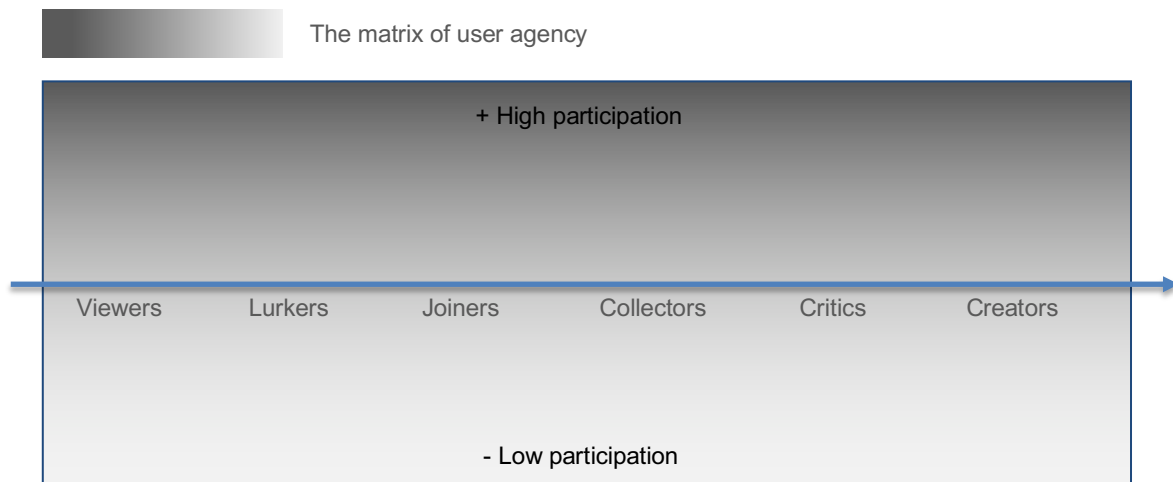
Most original and derivative works by prosumers are creative, mediated and/or transmediated representations in the form of cultural chaos and cultural jamming. They empower audiences by restructuring the power/knowledge relationship between production and consumption in digital media and communication. Most importantly, “power distance” that is defined as “the degree of inequality in power between a less powerful individual and a more powerful other” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 83) affects the level of prosumption participation and the construction of prosumers’ identities by contingent roles and subject positions (Törrönen, 2014) among the online communities within social media ecosystems.



**Figure 1. The Spectrum of Consumption/Prosumption Behaviors in Social Media**

Figure 1 is the most original model of the market research and represents a spectrum of consumption/prosumption behaviors in social media with regard to the users’ different level of participation. Different participation determines their identity construction and roles in social media communication and marketing among the online communities. Viewers at the left terminal of the spectrum are inactive users reading rather than creating/co-creating media content; creators at the right are the major UGC contributors. The arrow from left to right measures the power distance between viewers and creators in terms of their prosumption activities. However, viewers are also prosumers by means of interactive conversations via social media networking. The vertical axis interprets different type of viewers in terms of different level of participation. At the upper left corner users-as-viewers show a higher level of participation in terms of information sharing and redistribution. When moving from left

to right, those viewers are becoming more active prosumers and contributing to UGC by comments, critiques, and/or derivative works to different extents.



**Figure 2. The Matrix of User Agency in the Spectrum of Social Media Communities and Prosumption Behaviors**

Figure 2 incorporates the concept of user agency and the corresponding five types of digital consumers/prosumers – creators, critics, collectors, joiners, and spectators – into a matrix of prosumption dynamics. Viewers represent inactive users in social media sites (Li & Bernoff, 2008; van Dijck, 2009). This matrix model explains the complex and contingent roles and subject positions that social media communities may take to construct their prosumer identities. However, viewers as prosumers of almost no contribution to UGC are rare in those marketing case studies. Such viewers of limited or no contribution to social media conversations within the prosumption dynamics are not opinion leaders and play no significant role in electronic word-of-mouth and viral marketing at all. They are, indeed, not included in this research’s sampling frame as the focus of analysis is those more visible and extensive consumption/prosumption practices in relation to social media communication. Generally speaking, more visible and affective UGC comes from proactive prosumers of higher level of digital media literacy and communication skills for dynamic conversations in social media systems/environments. They may work simultaneously as creators, critics, collectors, joiners, and/or spectators. Their multi-layered identities within the prosumption dynamics form the matrix of user agency in social media. Some of their creative works by prosumption practices goes viral. Thereby, they become social media celebrities who may create/co-create online communities and make a living via advertising revenue. However, lurking has been regarded as “a natural process of human communities” instead of free-riding in digital communication (Ebner, Holzinger, & Catarci, 2005, p. 70; Nonnecke & Preece, 2000). Lurkers’ participation activities by their self-knowledge of lurking such like the Amazon recommendation system of sharing and buying generate “new frameworks for knowledge, possibility, and the experience of life” among online communities and contribute to a new mode of knowing by big data analytics in global digital networks of microstructures (Goriunova, 2017, p. 3918). Therefore, lurkers are deployed to replace spectators in the matrix of user agency such as creators, critics, collectors, joiners, and/or lurkers in social media consumption/prosumption practices.

A matrix model of identity mapping (see Figure 3a) is developed by differentiating prosumers into four identity types based upon their prosumption practices in social media. This facilitates a typological illustration of the influences of different prosumers on UGC and the construction of online communities. These identity types are “lurkers” and “activists” of lower level of prosumption participation, and “prosumers” and “produmers” of higher level of prosumption activities. They are all prosumers of multi-layered identities constituted by the matrix of user agency, that is, a hybrid complex of creator, critic, collector, joiner, and/or lurker. Activists play the major roles of critic, collector and joiner in social media communication, but also create some UGC by their amateur skills. They are more critical towards UGC compared with lurkers while produmers are more critical than prosumers. Both prosumers and produmers are major UGC contributors. In terms of power distance by prosumption activities, they are more powerful user agency and initiate the restructuring of the power/knowledge relationships in social media and digital communication. Produmers, that is, a term by the combination of producer and prosumer, possess professional media skills but flexible and creative imaginations toward social media production and participatory culture in their social and cultural performances of both dramaturgy and reflexivity (Goffman, 1959; Moeran, 2006). Prosumers in this model have only semi-professional media skills. These identity types and their dynamics within social media ecosystems will be empirically illustrated via the case studies.

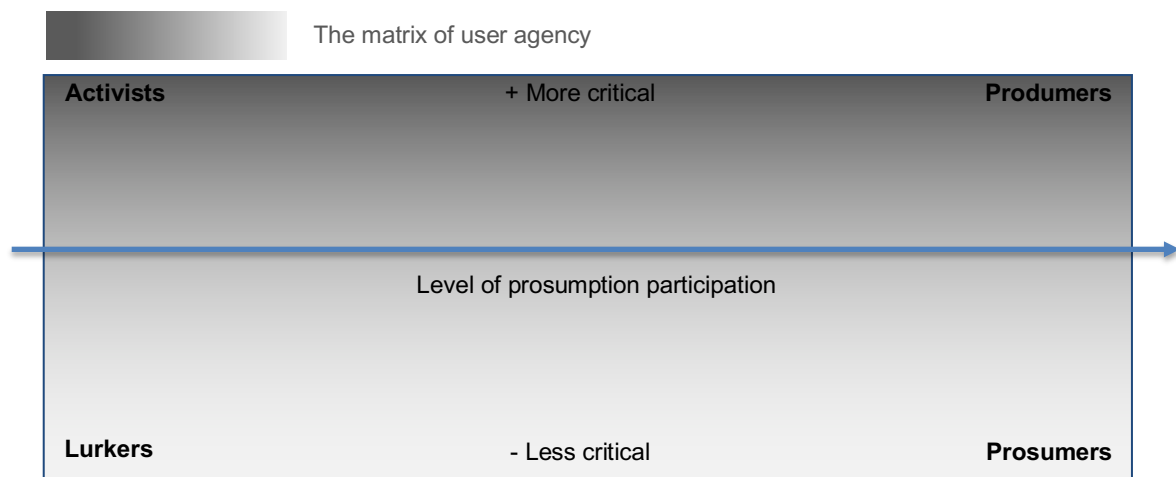


Figure 3a. The Identity Mapping of Prosumption Dynamics in Social Media

## 5. Business and video ethnography

As an innovative qualitative research method for understanding social phenomena without explicit knowledge, the power of business and video ethnography lies on its ability to investigate bodily practices in everyday lives whereupon the narrations of actions from qualitative interviews alone are insufficient (Mariampolski, 2006). Ethnographic studies of social media behaviors counterbalance a problematic research tendency “to reduce experience to language, discourse, texts or representation” (Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010, p. 1268) and consolidate those bodily practices into fresh ideas and insights for the development of brands, services, products, as well as other social concerns, in a new zeitgeist of digital communication (Woermann, 2012). Especially video ethnography that enhances the degree of empiricism and objectivity in behavioral research by

visual cues and representations is an effective means to cultivate a highly context-sensitive understanding of consumer/prosumer behaviors. There is a growing body of business and video ethnographic studies to investigate the ways in which advertising is viewed, engaged and personalized by the consumers within the actual social, cultural, spatial, temporal, as well as multitasking, contexts (Jayasinghe & Ritson, 2013).

Business and video ethnography is a consumer and marketing research tool for understanding culture by illuminating the consumer life in context. It condenses the ethnographic observation that generally takes academic research for months or years within a very short period of time by intensive videography and target-oriented ethnographic interviewing. Besides, a prototypical selection of cases by purposive sampling within the business framework via the systematic database from the agency plays a critical role in minimizing the number of cases but maximizing the relevancy. The recruitment process shows the efficiency of an experienced market research agency having a well-defined organizational system and an invaluable database of recruitees as human capital.

Behavioral or emotive techniques are deployed to explain unarticulated influences and emotional factors that drive consumer/prosumer behaviors. The participants talk about their stories instead of directly and simply responding to structured or semi-structured questions. Ethnography puts emphasis on the subject-driven participation during observation and interaction. Moreover, videography provides an invaluable record to capture detailed wordings, behaviors, emotions, and contexts in the field for intensive analysis.

Video ethnography in this study takes two main forms of videography – ethnographic interview and naturalistic observation. Generally, interviews record what the participants talk about what they do. Nonetheless, ethnographic interviews by videography take advantage to capture the participants' body language and expression that can be coded and analyzed. Besides, naturalistic observation by uncut video records unveils what the participants behave and do in more spontaneous and self-directive manners. Video ethnography emphasizes storytelling by stitching what the participants told and acted as reflexive and dramaturgical performances (Belk & Kozinets, 2005; Moeran, 2006).

In this research, 1 to 2 hours were used to observe every participant's relevant living or working routine on the way to work/school/play/home, and another 3 to 4 hours to study their bodily practices of social media and digital communication at home/office including around 2 hours of ethnographic interview. Generally, medium and wide shots were used to capture images of the participants' actions and reactions. Close-ups were tactically employed to focus on particular parts of the participants' bodily practices and human-computer interactions to clearly reveal social media content and prosumption activities.

All video footages of ethnographic interview and naturalistic observation of every participant were juxtaposed for comparative textual and discourse analysis. The participant's naturalistic performances and the corresponding contextual activities were triangulated with the interview discourses. Therefore, video ethnographer needs to have professional skills of documentary



videography and anthropological or social scientific research knowledge to “make sure to capture the entire context of behavior” within a very tight schedule and a not well-known natural environment (Mariampolski, 2006, p. 78). The empirical evidences by business and video ethnography helped to compile a holistic story to reflect the context and engagement of the participants in their own life world that is a key to observe and analyze consumer/prosumer behaviors in complex social media and digital communication.

## 6. Prosumption practices

The cases in this business and video ethnography project are prototypical exemplars on the basis of the client’s implicit expectation and the marketing research plan. They demonstrate different identity types of prosumers in the matrix model of social media practices. This justifies some pre-defined theoretical and marketing interests in the dynamics of prosumer behaviors by transmedia storytelling. The cases included limited but diverse participants from viewers to creators of social media to be operatively selected by the marketing research agency. The final fieldwork covered the production and design of UGC for both broadcasting and narrowcasting. Those prosumers created, shared and distributed/redistributed content among friends and online communities, viewed and criticized different sources of social media content via dynamic conversations and interactions, as well as interacted and commented on different types and formats of digital advertisements on social media platforms. Here some unique features of four cases from more viewing to more creating prosumption behaviors are reported. For business confidentiality and consent to the participants, visual representations of their bodily practices, that is, the most important unit of analysis, cannot be disclosed unfortunately.

Case A is a young man living with his girlfriend and working as part-time Chinese teacher and freelance copy-editor. He is a typical lurker spending a lot of spare and working hours to read news and entertainment information via social media. Once he turned on his computer of dual monitors at home, he opened browsers to display some news and play music and past radio programs via YouTube channel. “The previous interface of YouTube was different. You could find Most Popular and Most Viewed categories at the homepage. That was very useful. The categorized information is what I am looking for”, said Case A. “There must be some reason for the popularity of some social media content. Nowadays I can only see contents from my subscribed channels. It is sad for less surprise. Those popular social media contents cannot be easily found and viewed by users themselves who do not have any hints to search for that content.” Indeed, that is a drawback by marketing communication as he could only see his subscribed channels once he has signed in. He also achieved the most updated information about games and game development from some interactive chat rooms and vlogs by his lurking participation. He showed us a game promo in YouTube and complained about the video quality. “Great! I can get some updated information of game development overseas simultaneously. However, the video has limitation and cannot achieve high-definition quality. Or, just a problem of my selected video?” His self-reflexive performance and query about the video quality reflects his limited knowledge about video streaming. Then he opened a Japanese game chat room of dynamic information input by the users in real time. “You can see the live streaming of game show and simultaneously type in your

message to chat with others.” When taking a mini-bus to go home, he had kept playing games in his smartphone and tablet, which reveals the important role of a lurker in digital networks and online communities. A number of different games, game tools and accessories, and action figures had been discovered in his living room and working desk, which depicts the living context of his game and digital life. He always entertained himself by using different digital devices. “Smartphone and tablet have dramatically changed my lifestyle. In the past I must keep some physical books in my bag to avoid from being bored. Now I sometimes skip to take my bag but hold my tablet to go outside... Recently I had been struggling (with my girlfriend) for purchasing a new Sony 3D stereoscopic TV. But I have never used its 3D function. Now I am planning to change all computers at home to Apple.” His wishes were visually evidenced by his behavioral performance to go window-shopping in an electronic appliance shop. Besides, he criticized that some e-advertisements of push marketing to promote some luxury goods were irrelevant to his class and lifestyle, and made him feel very annoying. “Cartier... you are joking me!” He pointed to the video pop-up of Cartier e-advertisement on a social media platform. However, he had some good experience to get useful information for his travel from an e-advertisement of pull marketing. Although he was not an active UGC creator, he had recorded, uploaded and shared his students’ debate performances for private viewing and commenting. Nonetheless, his clumsy behaviors when searching those video clips explain his amateur status.

Case B is a young salesman who also serves as a cameraman for an amateur ballgame team to record its plays and friendly competitions for review. “When our team designs a play strategy, we will try it and shoot a video record for reviewing. Once the play strategy is successfully performed, I will stop shooting. Today is a friendly competition. So, I will only shoot some clips for record”, said Case B when he was shooting video for a ballgame in a stadium by his smartphone. The full high-definition video looked quite professional in quality and framing except its noisy audio recording. The video ethnographer also used smartphone to shoot his behaviors in the stadium in order to minimize the potential intrusion, but his speaking was professionally recorded by a wireless microphone system. Afterwards he used some amateur non-linear editing software to cut and paste those video clips for sharing with teammates via social media networks. Interestingly, the video ethnography evidenced that he did not employ some simply customized buttons on the menu bar to upload and share the final cut to social media platforms. He organized his output footages in his own filing system in a professional manner before uploading to the Internet. This is relevant to his working behavior in merchandising as he mentioned that is his habit. “Simply I will add background music to the video. Here I have just made a title ‘MXX friendly match’ on this footage.” The title was shown with a transitional effect and he had casually picked a music from his computer to the footage without any concern about copyright infringement. “I had muted the original sound track and then added this music. So, the two audio tracks don’t overlap and the video with music looks much more pleasurable.” Such kind of UGC reveals the characteristics of derivative works in social media that encourage freedom and creativity of prosumption behaviors. He edited some team’s video clips and music videos to share with the teammates and the public via YouTube (broadcasting), while some video records of their good practices would be shared with comments and feedbacks among the teammates within the private Facebook Group (narrowcasting). Those user-generated contents in the private group look more formal, or indeed boring. Intimate interactive conversations and sharing happen

among the teammates as an online/offline community. For digital marketing and advertising, he felt those pop-up images and videos annoying but acceptable if the display time was not too long to disturb his viewing. "In PC, always some pop-up windows suddenly appear to introduce some stuff or promotion. In iPad, some e-advertisements pop up only when you enter particular apps." He also pointed out some e-advertisements of pull marketing on the side column of social media platforms as fair and good, which promise the freedom of choices to audiences.

Case C is a girl studying digital media and music design. She has some solid working experience in a media production company and showed her final edit of a wedding for that company's job to the researchers. Likewise, her classmates have semi-professional knowledge and skills, and one of them had given a solo music performance in a subculture café. They are not simply viewers but the hybrid of lurker, joiner, collector, critic, and creator in prosumption. They tend to employ more professional social media platforms such as Vimeo and SoundCloud to view and share their own digital artworks and others' professional works. Nevertheless, the most popular social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube are still their major sources of information and sharing channels. "Facebook is a platform of human community for communication among my own friends and classmates... Many foreigners post videos via YouTube. Facebook may be used to share some videos, but the original source is YouTube, that is a treasurable archive", said Case C. She explained that some social media platforms like YouTube served as massive cultural archives of both professional media and UGC. Without such archival sources, many social media networks could not function properly. Most interestingly, she relied upon those interactive comments and sharing links in her Facebook to recall some important information and hyperlinks. Her bodily practices showed that Facebook was used as a search engine to find or to recall some references among her Facebook communities. "I will see the (Facebook) Page (of Ma Shushu) to learn guitar in my spare time... I searched about guitar players in Facebook and knew that he had regularly published some guitar lessons. I felt that his stuff (UGC) was okay and then I followed him." She also mentioned that she had learned how to make up herself for job interview from vlogging and regarded social media content and marketing as fruitful sources for training and educational purposes. She was tolerant to digital marketing and advertising and happy to view different types of promotional videos and UGC via social media, especially for learning purposes. "This is a video project by our team of classmates for self-interest. I have edited a little bit with another classmate together." She was opening an edited sequence in her MacBook Pro. "This is about a promotional video of 7-11 convenient store for participating in a short film competition." She increased the volume and a video of black-and-white Hong Kong landscape faded in on the screen. "I am responsible for both video shooting and editing. But we have discussed how to shoot those shots before. (It was shot) by Canon Mark II." Many youngsters like her are "digital residents" (see White & Le Cornu, 2011) and possess semi-professional media production skills, which is evidenced by her videography and editing skills, as well as her software and hardware preferences. The youngsters' prosumption activities contribute a lot to UGC and social media communication.

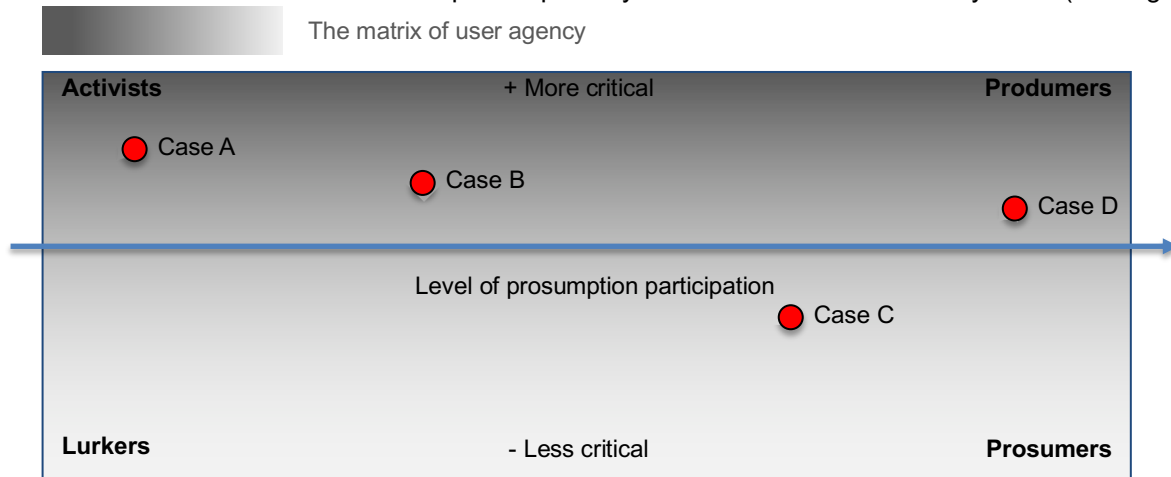
Case D is a returnee from Canada and he has become a social media celebrity for some viral videos broadcasted via YouTube. He is definitely a creator as he has worked for professional radio and

television productions and he continues to produce his own digital media content for blogging and vlogging. After the viral success of some prosumption works, he established his own production company with some friends. But different from traditional professional television production, he enjoyed to work under no pressure and took a long time to develop new ideas with his partners. “Apparently, he said to me he is very powerful (and convincing) now. His reference letter should be more trustworthy”, said Case D. “Yes, yes! He has become a university professor. But, have you made an appointment with Mr. Sung yet?” said his assistant. “Not yet. I have to get ready with all the reference letters first.” They are talking about some business plan and making cultural jamming for project ideas in a café. “Can we talk about some songs usually sung during the Chinese New Year? That is not relevant (to our topic), but we always do something irrelevant (to the theme). Just like what you say about ‘Kung Hei Fat Choy’ (a Cantonese greeting).” “Say, say more.” He typed to record some ideas in his laptop and interacted with his assistant and those Internet resources from MacBook Pro, iPad and smartphone for cultural jamming. Aside from the semi-professional equipment, the situation looked more like a casual tea gathering rather than a production meeting. However, such flexible and relaxing working practices reflect the important nature of playfulness in user-generated content and context that wins “likes” from online communities. “Indeed, the funniest part is to influence other people (by UGC). I had made a vlog to joking those boys use half an hour to gel their hairs. Their hairstyles looked like Dragon Ball comic head. I saw some comments to agree with that and they dare not to make hairstyle likewise any more. This is very amazing that someone’s vlog from Canada could affect so many people’s thoughts and actions in a long distance.” He generally read all the comments on his blogs and vlogs, but has seldom replied to criticism as he mentioned that fighting back was meaningless for a large amount of negative comments. However, those comments and views from social media communities were important to his business as the numbers of likes/dislikes and viewers made statistics for his marketing and even uplifted his viral videos onto the social media top chart. His company mainly made revenue from digital advertising in terms of the overlays of e-advertisements, commissioned projects, and product placements in his videos. “This is a (commissioned project) mocking a popular variety show at that time. It is promoting a telecommunication company’s Internet, 3G and Wifi services. Here it is (a logo of the company is shown as a product placement)... The response of the advertiser is very good because the number of viewing is over 700,000 on this vlog. Even though the advertiser employs a superstar to make an advertisement, it may not achieve such a large impact online. Online platforms are indeed strange and (social media celebrities) like us can create such a huge hit rate.” Nonetheless, he showed and explained that those product placements must be rational and of the lowest level of disturbance to the viewing experience in his vlogs. “This product placement is good and the audiences know it is an advertisement and accept it. Besides, this production is of good quality (and creativity). If you twist the plot or story of a video for advertising purpose, then audience would blame on you. The theme should not be the purpose of an advertisement.” He further reminded of those advertisers that the original styles and creative autonomy of vloggers’ prosumption practices should be protected from any distorting marketing forces.

## **7. Conclusion**

Video ethnography captured the prosumption behaviors of the subjects within the in-situ contexts. A fruitful amount of empirical and organic evidences was collected from those cases of different levels of participation to understand their prosumption behaviors within social media ecosystems. Their bodily practices as dramaturgical and reflexive performances revealed their perceptions and reactions toward digital advertisements as well as their self-presentation and self-reflection of everyday digital life of both materiality and immateriality. Individual behavioral attributes and attitudinal factors toward digital marketing, social media advertising and prosumption practices were demonstrated by the prosumers' dynamic conversations and transmedia storytelling. Such attributes and representational practices provide useful insights to marketers and advertisers, and can be used as the measurement instruments to further study prosumer behaviors and identities in digital and participatory communication.

On the basis of the matrix model of prosumption dynamics in social media ecosystems (see Figure



**Figure 3b. The Multi-layered Identification of Prosumption Dynamics in Social Media**

3a), the aforementioned four cases of this study are mapped onto the spectrum in terms of their individual prosumption practices and perceptions and reactions toward social media communication and marketing in their everyday lives (see Figure 3b). Their social media practices of different levels of participation help differentiate the four types of prosumers of multi-layered identities. This facilitates a typological mapping and understanding of the influences of different prosumer behaviors on UGC and the construction of prosumer identities as a hybrid complex of lurker, joiner, collector, critic, and/or creator in the matrix.

Case A is a lurker of rare participation in prosumption activities to provide the original or creative works to social media communities. But he is an active audience reading and sharing a lot of UGC. Indeed, he is an important consumer of digital media contents and digital devices in his everyday life. He is critical to social media platforms and digital advertising from his consumption/prosumption practices. He is close to the category of activists of critical mind and relatively high level of commenting actions both online and offline. Meanwhile, Case B is belonging to the category of activists of higher level of prosumption participation. He is more tolerant toward e-advertisements and digital marketing compared with Case A. His amateur videos contribute to UGC on different social media platforms. His friends and teammates function as lurkers, joiners, collectors, and/or critics by their dynamic

conversations and interactions. Case C should be belonging to the category of prosumers as she is an active semi-professional UGC creator and of a high level of acceptability and adoptability to digital advertising and marketing information especially for learning purposes. Case D is a typical produser of a relatively high level of participation in blogging and vlogging. He has solid and professional media production knowledge and experience, but he prefers to work flexibly like a freelancer of higher priority in freedom and creative autonomy. His vlogs and other user-generated contents are a result of cultural jamming by dynamic conversations and transmedia storytelling among social media communities and his partners. Compared with Case C, Case D is more professional and critical to cultural production in terms of originality and creativity. Produsers understand the gap between producers and audiences and the importance of e-advertising to social media ecosystems, especially to their survival for continuous prosumption practices. So, Case D is greatly tolerant to social media marketing of different modes and participates in different sorts of digital advertising by means of his prosumption activities.

The relative short-term observation of those participants within the selected environments and contexts by business and video ethnography may not fully depict the multi-layered identities and individual attributes of their prosumption practices in social media and digital communication. The limited samples in this study also make some drawbacks in defining the spectrum of prosumption dynamics. Indeed, many implications of business ethnographic studies to the clients are kept as secrets from the market research agency and the public. A balance between academic and marketing interests is still being pursued in order to enhance theoretical knowledge and methodological power by a compromising collaboration. This may provide us some empirical solutions for a better understanding of the rapidly changing networked society and digital culture by social media and prosumption practices among online communities of multi-layered identities.

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